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**Evaluation**

# Management response to the evaluation of the national human development report system*

1. National human development reports (NHDRs) are produced or overseen by more than 130 UNDP country and regional offices. Since their inception in 1992, over 550 NHDRs have been produced, in addition to several sub-national and regional HDRs. An independent evaluation of the NHDR system was recently commissioned by the Evaluation Office of UNDP.

2. The evaluation assessed the appropriateness and strategic relevance of the HDRs to UNDP and its goal of promoting human development. It also looked at their effectiveness and sustainability.

3. The evaluation found that the NHDRs had contributed significantly to the UNDP mission of promoting human development and recommended that UNDP regard the HDR system as a core component of its work, while providing stronger commitment and support to address the challenges and constraints faced by the HDR system. The evaluation offered specific comments and recommendations for improving that system.

4. UNDP management agrees with the main findings and recommendations of the evaluation. The HDR system must be strengthened with necessary financial, technical and institutional resources, while taking better advantage of the high-impact synergies it offers the entire organization and its partners, particularly in the context of United Nations reform and harmonization. UNDP management recognizes the ongoing efforts of the HDR Office, regional bureaux, country offices, and other internal and external partners to address many of the challenges identified by the evaluation.

*The compilation of data required to provide the Executive Board with the most current information has delayed submission of the present report.

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5. Management also recognizes that additional analysis and discussion will be required to examine more specific ways of supporting HDRs by drawing on existing corporate incentive systems.

6. Management further recognizes the need to mainstream a human development approach throughout all work of UNDP and its partners, not only through the system of HDRs.

7. More detailed comments from UNDP management on each recommendation offered by the evaluation, together with corresponding key action points, are provided in the annex, below.

# Annex

## Key recommendations and management response

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 1***

**UNDP should regard the NHDR programme as a core component of its mission and provide stronger support.** The NHDR is the only UNDP instrument available to promote human development in all its complexity at the national level. Headquarters should make clear its commitment to a very high priority for the NHDR system and not permit this programme to be pushed aside by new initiatives that constantly appear on the agenda (see recommendation 2). Such commitment should be reflected in headquarters and country offices, recognizing the contributions of the NHDR system within UNDP programming, accountability mechanisms and incentive systems. While headquarters support for the NHDR system should be strengthened, measures taken to that end must not compromise the decentralized nature of the programme or weaken the autonomy of country offices.

***Management response***

Management agrees that the system of sub-national, national and regional HDRs represents a core component of the overall human development mission of UNDP. This system must be strengthened with necessary financial and technical resources, while taking better advantage of the high-impact synergies it offers for the entire organization and its partners, particularly in the context of United Nations reform and harmonization.

Management recognizes the efforts of the Human Development Report Office (HDRO), regional bureaux, country offices, and other internal and external partners to address many of the challenges identified by the evaluation. This includes various discussions initiated by HDRO over the past several months on the key role of regional bureau directors and HDR focal points in helping ensure that resident representatives and HDR teams benefit from existing guidelines.

Management also recognizes that additional analysis and discussions will be required that have not been completed through the NHDR evaluation process to examine more specific ways of supporting HDRs through existing programming, accountability and related incentive systems. These efforts will, among other things, explore how sub-national, national and regional HDR processes can be used to complement other sources used to inform and strengthen UNDP programming at the country, regional and global levels, while taking into consideration the sensitive nature of certain HDR topics and their relevance in each context.

Management further recognizes the need to look at additional ways of promoting and mainstreaming a human development approach throughout all work of UNDP and its partners, not only through the HDRs.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 Message from Administrator sent to all UNDP staff on management's high-priority commitment to HDR system, including need for country offices, under the guidance and of resident representatives, to ensure sufficient financial, human and technical resources for their regular quality production and follow-up. | Initial message sent to all UNDP staff 5 December 2006 | Executive Office (HDRO) |
| 1.2 NHDR evaluation and management response in various targeted forms shared with UNDP staff, managers, and partners, including other United Nations organizations, donors, national governments and civil society organizations. | 1st quarter 2007 | HDRO, Evaluation Office (Executive Office) |
| 1.3 Terms of reference (TORs) for regional bureau directors and resident representatives to be revised to include shared responsibility for supporting NHDR quality and impact, particularly HDR processes not meeting minimum standards. | 1st quarter 2007 | Regional bureau directors (HDRO) |
| 1.4 Some regional centres already support the HDRs through full-time staff whose terms of reference include direct technical support and consulting to HDRs in their region. Other regional centres should follow this successful model and have at least one full-time staff member responsible for supporting HDR work in the region. | 2nd quarter 2007 | Regional bureau directors (HDRO) |
| 1.5 Direct message and follow-up communications to be sent from each regional bureau director to each resident representative and | 1st quarter 2007, ongoing | Regional bureau directors (HDRO, resident |

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|---|---|---|
| deputy resident representative in the region on need to support the NHDR system with resources as high corporate priority in line with UNDP corporate policy and guidelines. | | representatives, deputy resident representatives) |
| 1.6 Resident representatives, country directors and deputies trained and held accountable for supporting quality NHDRs with adequate financial, human and technical resources. | Ongoing | Resident representatives, country directors, deputy resident representatives, regional bureau directors (HDRO) |
| 1.7 Task force formed to review possible ways to support the HDR system through better use of existing programming, accountability, and incentive systems, including the strategic plan, results and competency assessments, programme cycle, resource mobilization, staff TORs, trust funds, focal point system, staffing and expertise. | Through 2nd quarter 2007, ongoing | HDRO (Operations Group) |
| 1.8 Task force formed to identify ways to better promote and mainstream human development approach in other work of UNDP and its partners. | 2nd quarter 2007 | HDRO (Operations Group) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 2***

**Clarify the relationship between the NHDR and other instruments and exercises.** A clear UNDP corporate policy on the exact relationship between NHDRs, MDG reports and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) is needed. The complementarities and differences in purpose among these instruments should be recognized. The competitive relationship for time, attention, resources, and political capital must be better managed so as to ensure an enabling environment for the NHDR programme. The independence of the programme must be protected.

***Management response***

Management recognizes the need to address further the practical challenges of supporting the NHDR system within a context of complementary priorities that compete for limited technical and financial resources.

Management also recognizes the work already done by HDRO to conduct a series of online and other discussions with UNDP staff and partners through workshops and policy meetings on this topic.

Management further recognizes the specific guidelines produced as a result of these ongoing discussions that clarify the complementary nature of the NHDRs with MDG reports, as well as with other UNDP and United Nations programmes.

Management also recognizes the ongoing efforts by HDRO and other UNDP units to incorporate these guidelines into existing learning activities.

| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
|---|---|---|
| 2.1 Guidelines on HDRs and related exercises reviewed, updated and disseminated to regional bureaux, country offices and HDR focal points to clarify complementary processes. | 1st quarter 2007 | HDRO (BDP, UNDGO) |
| 2.2 Corporate policy and any updated guidelines incorporated into relevant, ongoing training for UNDP staff and partners. | 1st quarter 2007, ongoing | HDRO (BOM, BDP, LRC, UNDGO) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 3***

**Promote a more productive two-way interaction between the global and the NHDR**. The upward influence of NHDRs on the global HDR has been smaller and less productive than it should be. The value of NHDRs should receive closer attention at headquarters, and HDRO should implement its plans to conduct mission exchanges and engage in joint outreach and advocacy efforts.

***Management response***

Management recognizes the efforts being made to take better advantage of synergies between the global and NHDR processes. These efforts draw on the combined resources of HDRO through the global HDR team and the NHDR unit. Additional efforts are required to deepen this two-way interaction. Management further recognizes that HDRs at all levels – sub-national, national, regional and global – serve complementary yet unique development functions. Each level is able to address various sensitive issues in a different way. Efforts to take advantage of inherent synergies between the different reports will serve to reinforce the unique role played by each type of report.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 3.1 HDRO to conduct mission exchanges, joint research, outreach and advocacy work with NHDR teams, and knowledge sharing through HDR-net, HDRStat-net and other networks. | Ongoing | HDRO (Regional bureaux, country offices) |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendation 4***<br>**Promote greater involvement of United Nations country teams (UNCTs) in the process of report preparation.** To promote the use of NHDRs in United Nations-wide efforts to achieve development goals, UNDP should promote greater involvement of UNCTs in the process of report preparation. | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management agrees with the need to better draw on the expertise and complementary work of UNCTs throughout the NHDR preparation process and its follow-up, particularly in the context of United Nations reform. Management also recognizes the inherent challenge of reaching out to United Nations and other partners with such a well-branded UNDP process and product. Many good examples of such collaboration already exist. | | |
| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
| 4.1 Resident representatives to encourage UNCT participation throughout HDR process and follow-up through sharing of expertise, data, joint activities, and possible co-financing. | Ongoing | Resident representatives (UNDGO) |
| 4.2 UNDGO support materials reviewed for possible inclusion and reference to HDR linkages. | 1st quarter 2007 | UNDG, HDRO |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendation 5***<br>**Encourage international capacity transfer through more regional workshops and bilateral exchanges.** The best tools for effecting international transfer to improve NHDR capacity have been regional workshops organized by HDRO and regional bureaux, as well as bilateral exchanges (some of them inter-continental). These initiatives should be introduced where absent and strengthened where practised. | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management recognizes the success of ongoing efforts to share core and innovative human development and HDR knowledge and good practices within and across regions through a variety of headquarters, regional, and in-country workshops, trainings, and exchanges.<br>Management also recognizes other successful efforts to share such knowledge through various good practice guidance notes, the 'HDR toolkit', technical reviews, the HDRO website and the NHDR workspace, the HDR and HDR-Stats networks, other Latin America and Asia-Pacific regional networks and virtual schools, the Oxford human development course, and new online advanced HD course offered by the Learning Resources Centre (LRC). Such efforts should be continued and expanded with new partners, including additional national institutes of learning. | | |
| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
| 5.1 HDRO to continue to conduct regional and in-country trainings, as well as support other capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives and networks in cooperation with BDP, BCPR, LRC, UNDG, regional bureaux and centres, country offices, and other partners. | Ongoing | HDRO, regional bureaux (BDP, LRC, country offices) |
| 5.2 Discussions initiated on possibility of introducing mandatory human development and HDR training for staff. | 2nd quarter 2007 | HDRO (LRC) |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendations 6***<br>**Emphasize national ownership of the NHDR.** The degree of national ownership should be increased as much as is compatible with ensuring political independence and analytic quality, keeping in mind that national ownership does not mean government ownership. | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management agrees that UNDP should work to increase national ownership of the NHDR process to the greatest degree possible within parameters defined by each specific country context, while ensuring objective analysis. Management recognizes the challenge of balancing national ownership and capacity building efforts with the need to ensure a high-quality UNDP commissioned and branded process that also builds internal UNDP capacity. Management also recognizes the guidelines and training materials already prepared by HDRO to support this goal. | | |

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 6.1 Ongoing training conducted and dissemination of guidelines on ways to ensure national ownerships, including the HDR toolkit, the HDR timeline, and other knowledge sharing activities described in issue 5 above. | Ongoing | HDRO, BDP, regional bureaux, LRC, country offices |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendation 7***<br>**Clarify and productively utilize the relationship of NHDRs with many other exercises.** These include the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), country programme documents (CPDs), national development planning documents, etc., which overlap variously with NHDRs (also see recommendation 2). | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management agrees with the need to better take advantage of the potential benefits of closer and more regular coordination of HDR processes with other UNDP and broader UNCT initiatives. This includes having HDR work feed more into and draw upon UNDAFs, CPDs, common country assessments (CCAs), and similar activities. | | |
| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
| 7.1 NHDR guidelines reviewed and related UNCT materials and guidelines updated to reflect synergies between the NHDR and other UNDP and United Nations processes (see key actions 2 and 4.2). | 1st quarter 2007, ongoing | HDRO, BOM, UNDGO |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendation 8***<br>**Move from introducing the discourse of human development to a deeper analysis of the challenges it faces.** As NHDRs and human development concepts have gained acceptance, the NHDR should deepen and sharpen analysis of impediments to human development and means of overcoming them. This is likely to require broaching politically and/or socially sensitive issues. Experience suggests that analytical excellence, combined with tact and skill, can make it possible to deal frankly with sensitive topics. | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management agrees that NHDR processes must move from offering general human development discourse and description to more targeted, prescriptive human development recommendations and advocacy on national priorities of an often sensitive nature. This issue is closely related to a larger question: the ability of each country office to engage national partners on substantive policy issues. In countries where such ability might be more limited, the NHDR process offers an excellent opportunity to strengthen such cooperation while increasing upstream policy influence.<br>Management recognizes the work being done by HDRO other partners to provide resources to support more targeted prescriptive human development recommendations. | | |
| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
| 8.1 Ongoing training and dissemination of guidelines, including the HDR toolkit and HDR timeline, peer reviews and other knowledge sharing activities described under issue 5, above. | Ongoing | HDRO<br>(BDP, regional bureaux, LRC, country offices) |
| ***Evaluation issue and recommendation 9***<br>**Revisit themes.** There is value in revisiting some earlier issues. Exactly because the NHDRs have frequently taken up some of the most basic and general issues in their early years – poverty, inequality, gender, etc. – there is a need to use subsequent NHDRs to check upon the progress regarding those issues, in the light of changed circumstances and with the possibility of using deeper analyses and more creativity of approach. In doing so, they should take advantage of the opportunities for complementarity with the MDG reports, in that the latter, by design, eschew critical analysis of policies from the perspective of advancing MDGs – a job that NHDRs can take on. | | |
| ***Management response***<br>Management agrees that NHDRs can increase their policy relevance by looking at the impact of policies over time for human development topics that previous HDR might already have looked at, including the MDGs. There are many examples of NHDRs successfully doing just this – these good practices should be shared more broadly. | | |
| **Key management actions** | **Time frame** | **Lead unit (Collaborating)** |
| 9.1 Good practices disseminated and incorporated into knowledge sharing discussions and trainings on ways to track and assess previous HDR themes and theme selection processes. | Ongoing | HDRO<br>(UNDG, BDP, regional bureaux, country offices) |

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| 9.2 Good practices shared on how HDRs can be used in some country contexts to support MDG monitoring and provide analysis on one or more MDG issues. | 2nd quarter | HDRO (BDP, regional bureaux, country offices) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 10***

**Disaggregate statistics to cover sensitive issues.** Disaggregating human development-related indices has proved useful for many countries, particularly those with high (geographic, social and economic) inequalities. Disaggregation has often initially taken geographic form as this is less controversial and may also have obvious 'champions', such as mayors and governors. It is important to progress to more controversial kinds of disaggregation, such as race, gender or caste – characteristics that are usually more important than geography in determining human development outcomes.

***Management response***

Management agrees that the use of a variety of disaggregated data can considerably improve the quality and impact of human development analysis, as can several other human development measurement and analytical techniques.

Management recognizes current HDRO efforts to prepare a statistical primer on measuring human development and related efforts to ensure minimum statistical standards and rigour for HDR teams, including: follow-up regional trainings, direct consultations, and ongoing discussions on HDR Stats-Net in cooperation with other UNDP and broader United Nations statistical capacity-building initiatives in support of national statistics offices and other national partners.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 10.1 Continue current HDRO efforts to increase NHDR statistical capacities. | Ongoing | HDRO (BDP, regional bureaux) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 11***

**Avoid both report fatigue and long gaps.**

Avoid both report fatigue from excessive frequency and policy irrelevance from long gaps between reports. The optimal gap is probably two years, possibly three if circumstances require. Cogency and relevance to policy are the criteria for success, and exact frequency should be determined with these in mind, together with country-specific considerations.

***Management response***

Management recognizes the importance of ensuring that HDRs are produced on a regular basis, and agrees that this frequency should be determined in part by each country context.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 11.1 Current guidelines describing the frequency of HDRs to be reviewed and updated to clarify the optimal frequency of HDR production, as well as the factors to be considered in determining this range for each country context. | Ongoing | HDRO (Regional bureaux, country offices) |
| 11.2 Particular attention and support provided to countries not yet fully meeting expectations for frequency. | Ongoing | HDRO, regional bureaux |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 12***

**Improve monitoring of NHDR impact.** Systematic monitoring of the results of past NHDRs is a weak link in the NHDR system. UNDP country offices should build such monitoring into their NHDR programmes and make the results publicly available.

***Management response***

Management recognizes the importance of monitoring and evaluating the results of HDR processes. In that regard, recent efforts led by HDRO to collect examples of HDR impact through the *Ideas, Innovation, Impact* publication and 2007 human development awards process are very timely.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 12.1 Existing guidelines for monitoring and evaluating HDR impact should be reviewed and updated drawing in part on the experience of the Evaluation Office with this Evaluation, as well as its broader evaluation experience. | 2nd quarter 2007 | HDRO (Evaluation Office) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 13***

**Improve the monitoring and evaluation of policies.** Systematic evaluation of policy results and performance is a crucial but weak facet of public policy in many countries. A potentially useful contribution of future NHDRs would be to help develop practical methods for monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes, especially with respect to their human development content and impact.

***Management response***
Management recognizes the need to build capacity within UNDP and among its national partners to monitor and evaluate development policies. The practical experience of HDRs in this regard is very useful.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 13.1 Ongoing efforts to synthesize the experience of HDR teams across a range of development sectors (as well as the experience of other UNDP projects) should be continued through the 'guidance note' series and similar network and knowledge sharing activities. | Ongoing | HDRO (Regional bureaux, BDP, BCPR, country offices) |

***Evaluation issue and recommendation 14***
**Strengthen outreach efforts.**

*(a) Knowledge produced in the course of the NHDR process should be made public.*
UNDP country offices should make it clear that all knowledge generated in the process of preparing the NHDR should be in the public domain. Clear guidelines on this matter from UNDP Headquarters would be useful. UNDP should also make background papers available on an accessible website.

*(b) Produce different versions of the reports to suit different groups.*
Potentially useful versions are shorter versions for time-strapped policy-makers, simpler versions for public consumption, and, where applicable, vernacular versions.

*(c) Make access to the NHDR easier.*
Copies should be distributed widely and be readily available in the public domain. All UNDP country offices should post their NHDRs on their website, which has not been done in a surprising number of countries. Currently Human Development Report Office is promoting efforts to have new reports be available online As online access to information is becoming increasingly important, UNDP should find, develop and utilize the most effective and user-friendly software for exploiting the great potential of online public access.

***(d)*** *Introduce human development material into university and school curricula.*
Conduct activities to strengthen society's capacity to absorb human development ideas through better education programmes for journalists, policy-makers, academics and the general public.

***Management response***
Management recognizes that the impact of HDR depends to a large extent on the level of outreach and advocacy efforts taken throughout the HDR process and follow-up. Much work is being done in this regard through a variety of efforts on the part of HDRO, BRSP and others at headquarters, regional centres, country offices and other partners. There is room to expand this work, including taking advantage of the new system of regional communication officers, as well as targeting further international donors and industrialized-country governments with outreach materials.

| Key management actions | Time frame | Lead unit (Collaborating) |
|---|---|---|
| 14.1 Priority efforts to map existing outreach and educational initiatives and to disseminate good practices to be continued. | Ongoing | HDRO (Regional bureaux, country offices) |
| 14.2 Other planned initiatives to increase HDR outreach and advocacy capacity implemented through new guidelines, targeted materials for journalists and other partners, and strengthened interactive HDRO and country office websites. | Ongoing | HDRO, (Resident representatives/ country offices) |
| 14.3 Resident representatives to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to NHDR budgets to permit comprehensive outreach. | Ongoing | Resident representatives/ country offices |
| 14.4 The biennial human development awards process – an incentive mechanism for HDR teams to enhance the quality and impact of their HDRs – to be supported by all UNDP management. | Ongoing | HDRO (Executive Office, regional bureaux, country offices) |